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Remarks on President's War Supplemental Request

by

U.S. Representative David Obey

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"We are here for two reasons this morning. First, because we are tired of the drift represented by the President's speech to the nation after General Petraeus's testimony last week.

The policy outlined by the President is being sold to the country as a plan to reduce our troop levels in Iraq, but it is quite the opposite.

It is a plan intended to guarantee that we will have a heavy troop presence there for a decade.

"When you strip away the fog, it is simply a plan to get us back six months from now to the same place we were six months ago before the surge began. It is not being undertaken because of any new determination to reduce troop levels.

It is simply recognizing that we do not have enough troops to sustain the surge level.

It is a confession that the President has not a clue about how to get us out of that civil war.

It is simply a plan to punt the problem to his successor – ruining two administrations rather than just one.

“If supported by the Congress, it is a recipe for keeping us tied down in a Middle East occupation for years, destroying what little good will we have left in the region. It is also a plan for draining the treasury dry of funds that we desperately need to invest in crucial initiatives here at home in order to build a stronger country and a more family friendly country.

“In addition to the regular defense appropriation request of \$463 billion, the President is asking Congress to appropriate an additional supplemental request of almost \$200 billion – a blank check to finance U.S. activities in Iraq – and he clearly expects that request to be repeated for years to come.

“I would be more than willing to report out a supplemental meeting the President’s request if that request were made in support of a change in policy that would do three things.

1. Establish as a goal the end of U.S. involvement in combat operations by January of 2009.

1. Ensure that troops would have adequate time at home between deployments as outlined in the Murtha and Webb amendments.

1. Demonstrate a determination to engage in an intensive, broad scale diplomatic offensive involving other countries in the region.

“But this policy does not do that. It simply borrows almost \$200 billion to give to the Departments of State, Defense, Energy, and Justice with no change in sight.

“As Chairman of the Appropriations Committee I have absolutely no intention of reporting out of Committee anytime in this session of Congress any such request that simply serves to continue the status quo.

“I also have no intention of acquiescing in a policy that will result in draining the treasury so dry that it will result in the systematic disinvestment of America’s future.

“That brings me to the second reason that we are here. The President is objecting to the fact that we are trying to depart from his domestic budget request by some \$22 billion, an amount about one tenth as large as the amount that the President wants to spend again this year in

Iraq.

“CBO estimates we are spending \$10 billion dollars a month in Iraq. That’s \$7 and ½ million in the time this press conference will take, and that is all borrowed money.

“The result is that there is no sense of shared sacrifice in this country on this war. The only families being asked to sacrifice are military families and they are being asked to sacrifice again and again and again.

Meanwhile, even the most fortunate of the rest of us are being asked to make no sacrifice whatsoever.

Those Americans who make more than a million dollars a year, instead of being asked to sacrifice are being asked to accept over \$50 billion in tax cuts, again all paid for with borrowed money.

That simply sends the bill to our kids.

“We need to stop pretending that this war doesn’t cost anything.

“This war will cost future generations billions of dollars in taxes that we are shoving off on them and it is devouring money that could be used to expand their educational opportunities, expand their job training possibilities, attack our long term energy problems and build stronger communities.

“If the President really is concerned about stopping red ink, we are prepared to introduce legislation which will provide for a war surtax for that portion of military costs that are related to our military actions in Iraq.

“We are choosing not to offset costs associated with our efforts in Afghanistan, because we believe that those are legitimate, because our Afghanistan effort is aimed at eliminating the Taliban who gave shelter to al Qaeda, and that action will benefit future generations. But those future generations should not be saddled with paying for an ill advised war in Iraq that seems to be never ending.

“If this war is important enough to fight, then it ought to be important enough to pay for.

“We know that this proposal is going to be controversial – I don’t expect to get the support of our leadership or the support of our caucus at this point – but by putting together this bill we hope people will stop ignoring what this war is costing American taxpayers and call the President’s bluff on fiscal responsibility.

“And please realize, that if such a proposal is not passed, and the war continues, one of two things will happen. We will either run up insurmountable debts, or we will drain the treasury dry of funds that are essential to making the domestic investments in education, health, medical research, science, law enforcement, that our crucial to creating a stronger country and more prosperous families.

“It is time for the President and the Congress to face up to some really hard choices. It is time for all of us to face up to the consequences of the President’s actions.”

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